

VZCZCXYZ0002
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHUL #0822/01 1450943
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 250943Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4423
INFO RUCNKOR/KOREA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUACAAA/COMUSKOREA INTEL SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSKOREA J5 SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHMFISS/COMUSFK SEOUL KOR PRIORITY
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY

S E C R E T SEOUL 000822

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/24/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)
SUBJECT: ROKG REACTION TO 2ND DPRK NUCLEAR TEST: SUPPORT
UNSC ACTION

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

11. (S) SUMMARY: ROKG Representative for Korean Peninsula Peace and Security and Six-Party Talks Wi Sung-lac told the Ambassador in a May 25 afternoon meeting that the ROKG agreed with the USG that the test was an "outright challenge" to the international community and required a firm response. He suggested that the appropriate response, rather than creative ideas for resuming the Six-Party Talks, would dominate the U.S.-ROK summit in June. He said the ROKG had not discussed joining the Proliferation Security Initiative at emergency meetings today. The Ambassador explained that the USG would consult with the international community on swift, substantive action in the UN Security Council. The timing of the test, barely two days after former President Roh Moo-hyun's apparent suicide, came as a shock here. The two happenings dominate the news waves in Korea, probably lessening the shock value -- and pressure on the ROKG -- of each had they taken place alone. END SUMMARY.

Second Test

12. (S) After the reported 9:54 a.m. (local) 4.5 magnitude seismic event at 41.285N, 129.004E in the vicinity of the suspected DPRK nuclear testing facility at Punggye, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFAT) held an emergency meeting, followed by an emergency cabinet meeting led by President Lee Myung-bak at 1:30 pm (local). The Blue House issued statement calling the test a "serious threat to not only the Korean Peninsula but also to Northeast Asia as well as international peace and security," and a "grave challenge to the international non-proliferation regime." (Translated text sent to EAP/K.) The KOSPI index fell sharply on news of the test but had virtually recovered by the end of the trading day.

13. (S) The ROK military has "increased its vigilance," which is a verbal order meant to focus its troops and reassure its public, but did not raise its state of alert, nor has it detected any unusual movements by the North Korean military. ROK media has, however, reported the launch of a short-range North Korean missile off the east coast from the Musudan-ri missile site. The launch, which reportedly occurred two hours after the apparent nuclear test, followed navigational warnings issued by the DPRK last week and many expect there will be further missile tests to come.

ROKG Reaction

14. (C) Six-Party Talks Representative Wi Sung-lac, the ROKG's senior official on DPRK nuclear issues, told the Ambassador

in an afternoon meeting that the "outright challenge" to the international community and defiance of UNSCR 1718 required a firm response. He noted that Foreign Minister Yu had met Chinese Foreign Minister Yang in Hanoi after the test, that they agreed on UNSC action, but Wi at several points expressed reservations about whether China would indeed back meaningful actions, even though it should recognize that the DPRK's behavior was "outrageous." He asked for continued consultations on what sanctions might be imposed, suggesting that all 11 entities proposed for sanctions in April, three of which were chosen, could be included now as a first step.

15. (C) Wi said that Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso had called President Lee Myung-bak at 4 p.m. (no readout available), that Lee would try to call Chinese President Hu Jintao, and that the Blue House had requested a call with President Obama. Wi suggested that the UNSC and related responses to the DPRK test would dominate the North Korea portion of the U.S.-ROK June summit, saying it might be awkward to discuss creative ideas for resuming the Six-Party Talks. He also probed for information about a possible U.S. bilateral approach to the DPRK.

17. (C) Wi said he shared the prevailing view that the nuclear test was related to internal/succession issues in the North, but he had seen no reliable information about what was transpiring. He suggested that the North made a tactical mistake by having the test just after former President Roh's death, in effect cutting short the emotional reaction from the left.

18. (S) Wi added that he was concerned about intelligence reports that a Taepodong 2 missile had been moved from its usual location near Pyongyang to an unknown site, but there was as yet no evidence that a TD2 launch was under preparation.

19. (SBU) Comment: Of course the South Korean government and public knew that the DPRK would conduct another nuclear test with little or no forewarning based on its April 29 statement to that effect; still, the test came as a shock because, unlike the TD2 launch, it came without any specific warning or intel leaks. The test also comes at a time when Koreans are transfixed by former President Rohm Moo-hyun's suicide on May 23. In fact, the DPRK had responded to Roh's's death with a personal condolence message from Kim Jong-il. Now the news waves in Korea are no longer dominated by grisly details of Roh's suicide and the anger of Roh' supporters, blaming the ROK prosecutors and President Lee. Ironically, these two mega events, taking place at the same time, makes each of them more manageable for President Lee.

STEPHENS